

Testimony for HB 6616

Members of the Human Services Committee, my name is Mark Kosnoff, I live in Meriden, Connecticut, and I'm writing to you today in support of **House Bill 6616, An Act Concerning Expansion of Benefits to Those Ineligible Due to Immigration Status**. I am also the Executive Director of United Action Connecticut, a faith-based organization that advocates for social justice causes that has member congregations throughout the central part of the state, the Connecticut River Valley and Southeastern Connecticut.

My testimony will come from a different angle because I'm the old, white guy who has been relatively healthy my whole life, has had employment-based health insurance for my adult life, am currently covered under Medicare and, thank God, have rarely had to use my health insurance to pay for a medical situation. You're probably wondering why I am submitting this testimony.

As I mentioned, my organization, United Action works on social justice issues. In the 17 years I have been with the organization the two items we have continually supported have been, access to quality, affordable health-care for all Connecticut residents because the high cost of health-care makes it impossible to pay for care without insurance; and secondly, immigration reform or at least, relief for the immigrant community because this group of people has become vital to Connecticut's economy. Besides the local and state taxes they pay, the immigrant community hold many of Connecticut's essential jobs. Agriculture; construction; home health aides, the people who care for our elderly; domestic workers, the people who clean houses so others can do their work; medical support personnel; restaurant workers; these are all important industries that depend greatly on immigrant employment. Despite being employed in these industries, for one reason or another, most immigrants do not have health insurance. In addition, immigrants often are unable to access other types of relief that the state offers low-income residents. I think we owe these people.

House Bill 6616 will go a long way to help our goal of giving access to health-care for thousands of people and giving some relief to the immigrant community.

I would like to add a short, personal story. Four weeks ago, my daughter who is over 40 years old, delivered twin babies at Hartford Hospital. My wife and I are elated, but unfortunately the babies were delivered two months premature and will probably remain in the hospital neo-natal intensive care unit until March. My daughter does have great health insurance, but because of her age and the fact that she was having twins she was going for weekly check-ups during her pregnancy.

Four weeks ago, during one of these routine exams, it was discovered that one of the babies, due to its position in the womb, was not getting the nourishment it needed and it was feared that it would not make it to full term. In addition, my daughter now had preeclampsia, a form of extremely high blood pressure that could endanger both my daughter and the babies. The decision was made to do an emergency C-section. Thankfully, everything has worked out well. The babies are in incubators, and each is being monitored by a nurse 24/7 for body temperature, heart rate, brain function and a host of other conditions as well as being feed through a tube and getting all other necessary care. I simply marvel at modern medicine.

But then I think, what if my daughter had been an immigrant and didn't have that quality health insurance? Without the regular, weekly checkups my daughter would have experienced serious

complications and one the two babies probably would not have survived. Thanks to this legislative body, immigrant, pregnant women now do have access to pre- and post- natal care through a bill passed two years ago, and also children up to the age of 12. You are to be commended. But why have we stopped there? What about a 14-year-old with asthma, or people with diabetes, or heart conditions, or a host of other chronic conditions? I realize there is a monetary cost to provide the insurance coverage to this group, but a lot of that cost can be recouped from the federal government through a waiver; reports also show that hospitals could realize an estimated savings of over \$63 million due to uncompensated care and many more millions could be saved through preventative care. And how about the human cost of not doing anything. Should anybody be expected to suffer because they can't afford to pay to see a doctor.

Members of the Human Services Committee I ask you to please support HB 6616, it is the moral thing to do, it makes sense economically, and it will help bring some relief to a community that greatly deserves it.

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